

BROCTON MOTT, REALIST

By Kate Jordan

(Mrs. F. M. Vermilye)

HE was in his superb Elizabethan workshop with a half-dozen cronies, discussing Verlaine and eyeing the absinthe under the Tudor lamps. To study and stand aside were Brockie's specialties. He did not crave the absinthe on his palate nor its high jinks in his brain; its neighborhood was sufficient; to clasp the glass with long, pale fingers, to watch the light making smoky changes in the green danger, to taste it dreamily and infrequently were enough. The absinthe was part of the *mise-en-scène* with which he surrounded himself, as were the big settle in the chimney corner and the faded tapestries on which he had spent in one afternoon all of his Uncle Sydney's legacy.

It was two in the morning when Brockie saw the last of his friends depart. He went back and watched the candles' ends giving dying flashes in the Tudor lamps, the spilled absinthe twisting across the big, rafted table patterned after one he had seen in a rotting Irish castle by the Irish Sea. He was satisfied with himself. He had everything—success, youth and position, and he was necessary to another human being—Betty Jefferson, belle of two seasons, blond beauty and heiress to three millions.

But though all was well with him in a material sense, an irritating, contradictory imp had taken possession of him these last few days.

He went over to the big, many-paned window and pushed aside the tapestry. Below yawned the loneliness and electric glitter of upper Fifth Avenue at two o'clock in the morning,

the life of the night over, the life of the day not yet begun.

"It is the hour of innocence," said Brockie, lighting a last cigarette and leaning against the dim arras, which sent out an old fragrance defying a name.

He scowled at the string of lights that lay below like jewels frozen in mid-air; they seemed winking evilly. He watched indifferently the progress of a cab along the drab oblong, and it suggested nothing but a cab.

How often, standing there alone with the silent city below him after a night with his cronies, had he felt his brain quicken, his fingers tingle for a pen! But not to-night. The little company had been as brilliant as usual, but Brockie was like one outside a magic circle without the password; no new inspiration came to rout his obsession of the past week.

"What the devil am I to do?" he thought, nestling into the corner of a huge, pew-like seat near the window; "I can't write the thing and I sha'n't try. I've made my hit with romances of the Middle Ages, and to become modern would be madness. Nothing can excuse a false note. Think of Wagner writing a popular air or of Salvini in a comedy drama and a boiled shirt! Think of Brocton Mott quitting tourneys and moats, forests in fanciful dominions, knights disporting their ladies' colors, and those ladies of the style to be found only in thirteenth century tapestries—leaving all these to write a Balzacian story of this period, of this new country, of New York—not even of my own set, but of common working people who

keep shops and things of that sort—the heroine a working girl!" He gave a mirthless laugh. "I never knew a working girl. I don't believe I ever saw one," he thought, defiantly. "Of course I've passed them on the streets, bought from them over counters, but Lord! I never looked at them with seeing eyes. What the deuce am I to do? Adee wants another story by July, and there isn't an embryo idea lying round but this, and this is full-grown, vital, going to fight for its life. If I could only put the scene in England at the time of the Roman Invasion—but I can't."

Brockie left his man to put out the candles and place the iron guard before the sinking embers and went to bed.

In the morning his idea was with him, poised like a sprite on his pillow, and an insistent sprite that threatened to grow to an Amazon and overpower him.

"There's no use trying to get away from it," he muttered at last; "I've got to write it."

Though a luxurious worldling, a human exotic by birth and habit, and encrusted with the affectations of the aesthetic tribe, Brockie was nevertheless honestly a writer of much strength and originality. His idea, though set in an environment to which he was not attracted, seemed so genuinely an inspiration that when once he yielded to its insistence his determination grew into veritable enthusiasm.

"The heroine first," said Brockie, as he dressed. "I'm an apostle of Truth off to find a working girl. She must be young but have the air of being experienced in responsibilities. She must be beautiful, with subtlety and character in her face; accepted suffering must be there as a mist over water; she must enshrine the unexpected; something about her must inspire both worship and pity."

He turned to the east and took a Third avenue car down town. It carried a load of deplorables; all uninteresting, some offensive. At the beginning of the Bowery he leaped

off and walked along past glittering pawnshops and liquor "parlors," the elevated trains thundering over him and racking his nerves. He saw a face that might be used for the Italian sailor in his story, followed the man to a cheap eating-house and paid for rolls and coffee he did not touch. He saw an old man who might do for the miser he required; but among the women he passed there was none with more than features.

"Beauty?" thought Brockie, with complete weariness, "who says poor women have beauty?"

Girls looked after him and laughed. He was exquisite for the Bowery.

More than a week went by in his search for types. He found the neighborhood he wanted and made minute notes; he found the house where much of the story would occur; he had the sailor, the miser, the cripple, the heroine's brother, a fairly good composite idea of her lover—but where was she? Pretty working girls he had seen since the first day, but not his goddess in rags. He began to believe she did not exist. With inertia and dismay he shut up his papers and went to play golf at Aiken for a week.

Fifth Avenue was looking lovely when he came back. Though early in March, Spring seemed in its apogee. Shadow and light sent moth-like flickerings over the tall houses, and a sky as blue as Italy's showed above them. The crowded, uphill Avenue glittered like a new coin.

"Why, Brockie!"

He knew that lisp and drawl, and he knew who affected pure, distilled roses as a perfume. Mary Lanmouth was getting out of a brougham. She was all in gray.

"So glad you're back!" she said.

"Where are you going? Take me in tow."

"Come along. I've been an hour at Léontine's trying on, and I'm dead. I'm making for a little tea-room here. It's only been open a little while, and it's all done up in Chinese trappings—the dearest place. I want to hear the Aiken news. Is

Fifi Bleecker letting her hair go back? Are the Heriot-Grays going to take that big family wash to the divorce court? What's the matter, Brockie? Who is it?"

They were seating themselves in a corner, and Brockie was staring over her shoulder and down the vacant room as if about to greet someone.

"It's only that girl by the tea urn. Here she comes," he said, and sat back with a sigh of content.

"Oh, I've seen her before. Isn't she a lovely creature? She makes me feel like a germ. She has no business walking about. She belongs on a pedestal."

The waitress came over, a lacquered tray in her hand.

"Tea, please," said Mary.

Brockie said nothing. He was looking at the unconcerned beauty's face in absorbed silence.

"We'll have something to nibble," said Mary. "Biscuits, please."

"There are no biscuits, only crackers," said the goddess; "you can have them buttered or sweet."

"Crackers, then, buttered," and Mary made a *moue* at Brockie as the girl moved off. "A pedestal indeed for her, and she in marble, so she couldn't speak and break the spell."

But she just suited Brockie. Her voice was melodious, her accent uncultivated. She did not suggest the decadent gentlewoman, and the minor inference of "better days" did not hang about her. He needed her just as she was—a girl of the people, born in a tenement, with her shoes worn sideways at the heel, but with that about her which awakened speculation as to what her possibilities and limitations might be, and with a face to make one dream of historic women of great beauty and dark sins.

His mind was now as responsive as an instrument strung and tuned as he imbibed leisurely every detail of the girl's face. Save for her dead white skin she was a perfect Egyptian type. The black, crinkled hair grew up from her low forehead and thick, round neck with a lustrous clearness that left each individual tendril show-

ing as if it were fibrous jet set in wax; her nose was level with her forehead—a rare thing in these days—the nostrils spreading slightly and scarce lifted by a curve; the fine, long eyebrows swept across her forehead in the lines of scythes; the eyes were a burning gold, with heavy lids glistening as tulip leaves; the mouth was full and long, with flowing curves, as ardent and discontented as her eyes.

In her occupation of tea server a black-and-gold embroidered Chinese coat covered her to the knees, leaving exposed a dingy skirt with bulging shoes beneath it.

She had no eyes for the pair she had served. They were nothing to her. She stood by the tea-urn again, an elbow in one hand, her chin in the other. Brockie, who missed nothing, heard her sigh heavily and impatiently as she stared at the animated Avenue through the window.

Mary left him there and went on to her milliner's. He said he had some scribbling to do and liked the sandal-scented corner and the tea.

"And—the girl," said Mary, shaking a pearl *Suède* finger at him. "Ah, Brockie, you innocent, to imagine I don't catch on! Your artistic perceptions must not rust because Betty Jefferson happens to be in Europe, eh?"

"Really, you're wrong—you don't understand."

"Oh, of course not! But I'd like to stay and watch the *modus operandi*. How will you begin with her? What fun to be a man and be able to climb trees to pick peaches!"

She laughed and fluttered out. The girl by the urn looked after her somberly, then at him, and resumed her staring.

He struck his spoon on the saucer. She caught up her tray and crossed the room to him.

"What are you thinking about?" he drawled.

Her gaze filled with the quick mockery of her kind for what they do not understand, then changed to open amusement.

"She thinks me crazy," was

Brockie's reflection; and he was right.

"Do you want more tea?" she asked, coldly.

"Presently. But I'd like to know, first, what you think of here all day. This shop is very quiet."

"Trade's dull," she said. "We shut up to-morrow; it doesn't pay."

"And then? What do you do then?"

She shrugged her shoulders, her gold-colored eyes inscrutable.

"You'll get other work somewhere?"

"That ain't so easy." She looked at him with deepening amusement. "You can ask questions to beat the bass drum, can't you?"

"I hope I've not asked too many, because I want to ask more. What's your name and where do you live?"

"I don't see that that's your business." Her brows met in genuine anger. "Do you want more tea, or don't you?"

"Which means—get out," said Brockie, sadly, as he sat back and screwed his glass into his eye. "Now see how unreasonable you are. Here I stroll in, help to break up your slow day, find you most interesting from a most respectful standpoint, and you want to turn me out. Do you know I've been searching this town for you for weeks?"

He saw her gasp.

"For me?" she faltered.

"For you. Now that I've found you you're not going to get rid of me so easily. I need you as a model."

Her face cleared. At last she could assign a status to him in her thoughts.

"So you're an artist. I didn't know whether you were a masher or just plum crazy. But as you are an artist——"

"I have the privilege of madness, eh? You know some artists, then?"

"I was a model for a little while before I got this place. It was tiresome standing round, and I caught cold."

Her beauty was enrapturing as she stood there with folded arms, delivering these flat statements, and the

artist in Brockie was drunk with satisfaction.

"Tell me something about it," he said, his voice hushed, afraid to seem too eager. "What did you pose for?"

"Oh, my goodness!—lands only knows! Generally lying round on a sofa togged out in shawls and a pipe." She gave a disdainful gurgle. "That was easy, but last time I had to stand on one foot with a tray held out—so," and she assumed the pose.

"Salome, I'll bet—and what a Salome!" exclaimed Brockie.

"That's it," she said, now vivacious and at ease; "that's what he called it. I saw the picture afterward. Ugh! he'd put a head on the tray—John the Baptist's. I got cold there, too. I had stuff like a curtain round me and a lot of gold jingamarees hanging over my face. I said I'd never pose again, but I may have to when this is shut up."

"Well, will you pose for me?" asked Brockie, promptly. "I'll pay you well."

"Draped?" she snapped, taking up cup and saucer as another customer came in.

"Just as you are. In fact, I sha'n't want to paint you. I'm another kind of artist. I merely want to study you."

"Study *me!*" and she laughed heartily, her hand on her hip.

"Yes, I mean to put you in a book. I'm a writer. Here's my card. What's your name and where do you live?"

"Celia Murphy, No. — Rivington street."

"Will you come to-morrow?"

"What time?"

"Ten o'clock."

"All right."

On the morrow and on many days following Celia was a fixture in Brockie's home. At first she was frankly suspicious of his sanity and his intentions. To be told that all she had to do in order to earn a generous salary was to make herself quite at home in this odd, beautiful place, to rest and eat and chatter, put a point on her natural sharpness

and kept her instinct of self-defense awake.

But as weeks went by and nothing happened to alarm her she gave Brockie up as a puzzle for which she had no answer, and with vagabond philosophy made the most of a comfortable situation where she was paid and fed for doing nothing.

During the first week Brockie scarcely went out at all. He spent the days in an oriental robe and made Celia talk to him until she assured him her "jaws ached."

"What on earth do you want to hear all this stuff for?" she said at last. "You ask so many questions about where I live, about my Aunt Mary, my brother Matt—and—and—Denny Ryan—and how much my father earns on the ferryboat, anyone would think you were a detective." Her eyes narrowed shrewdly and she stood up. "I wonder if you are—I wonder. I wonder if you got me here to give Denny away. Is that it? Has he done something? Has he?" and such splendid scorn blazed from her eyes Brockie's heart glowed within his narrow chest.

"Don't be foolish, Celia! I'm just what I told you. I write books. Do you understand? I'm writing about a girl like you. She has a lover. You have a lover. I want to read your heart, for that will help me to understand my heroine. Don't you see? I want to find out how much you love Denny Ryan—that's a good name for my man, by Jove!—how much you'd do for him, and if, for instance, I were a detective—which is nonsense—and you betrayed him to me unguardedly, just how you'd feel and what you'd do. Now there—tell me that."

She swept him with a look of burning contempt, and he could see the pulse beating in her strong, white throat.

"If I did that," she said in a still voice, the words like slow drops of water, "I'd first shake the breath out of your miserable little body—then I'd lie for Denny—I'd swear lies on a stack of Bibles—and if they

sent him up I'd throw myself in the river!"

"You would?" cried Brockie, seizing her hands and swinging them. "Yes, by gad, you would! Splendid! Don't stop."

"That's all I have to say," she said, and sank into stormy silence.

Brockie told no one of his "find." He had half a dozen rooms in his suite, and Celia was easily kept out of sight of chance callers. Occasionally he made her stay and dine with him, but generally she left before the evening hours, when his cronies were likely to drop in. As it was Brockie's habit to withdraw from society when busy on a book until he had the first proofs read, his absence created no comment, and meanwhile the novel progressed in strides. He made many excursions into the tenement house district where Celia lived, and once prevailed on her to ask him to lunch in her own home. What a mine of suggestion that day was!—the most important item being the unexpected visit of Denny Ryan, who with keen eyes looked murder at Brockie over the sausages and fried potatoes.

"I'm glad I went," he said, as he sat writing that night. "What reality a few actual details give! the smoky lithograph of the Pope over the stove, that one-eyed cat, and above all the red hair on Ryan's hands." Brockie helped himself to brandy and sniffed at the hyacinths in his coat. "That man is as tribal in his instincts as one of Boadicea's oarsmen! It's a great bit of insight to realize it's the brute in him that Celia loves."

Four months droned away in Brockie's studio, days full of peace and veritable charm. The novel was practically done, and he was lingering in town to give it the last touches. August at the latest would see him in Newport, and there he would meet Betty again.

"I am coming home, Brockie," she had written, "and will be with the Fordhams for August. It will be good to see Bellevue avenue again. I've caught a big fish for the season,

too. Lord Braybrooke and his sister are coming home with me. He is decidedly *épris*, dear boy, and not with my ducats, either. If I were not foolish enough and democratic enough to think Brockie Mott an awfully nice boy I could be a duchess. Don't let this keep you awake, though. I am, as ever, the same

"BETTY."

The windows of the studio were open in the breezy afternoon, and the murmur of the town, hushed by distance, had the sleepy cadence of the sea. Celia was sitting in an East Indian chair—an anachronism in the early English studio which was permitted by hot weather—absorbed in a book, and Brockie was turning over a lot of loose leaves, the accumulated scribblings of four months, preparatory to destroying them.

He glanced now and then at Celia as his eye ran over them:

NOTES

I think Celia has a secret contempt for me. To pay her for coming here and talking to me strikes her as poor business sense. I often catch her looking at me as a naturalist looks at a queer bug. She does not admire me. She likes strength and bigness in a man. She told me so. . . .

To-day I made her have her hands done. She has good nails, fundamentally. She was as pleased as a child who is told to pull a clock to pieces. I'll make her take some treatments. . . .

Happened in and found her studying her profile in my hand mirror. I know she'd been ransacking my bathroom, too. She was strong of my verbenas extract. She's of an inquiring mind. Well, she's a woman. . . .

Celia is as luxurious and dainty as a cat. She's just waking to a knowledge of what ease and beauty mean. I sometimes think she's Cleopatra doing penance in this life for her many *petites affaires* and her penchant for murder. I find her reading a lot. It was "The Life of Nelson" yesterday. . . .

She's passing from admiring to assimilating what's best, and criticising what's deficient. She wears her hair in the fashionable pompadour now. Very fetching. She asked me yesterday what I thought the most useful and the most

absolutely necessary attribute in manners a society woman should possess. I suggested self-possession. This morning I've noticed that with the enthusiasm of the convert she's going about with a perfectly expressionless face, and I don't believe a pistol shot at her ear would make her wink an eyelash. . . .

She's making rapid progress. Nature can transform a beggar maid into a princess by a sleight of hand, but Lazarus might study high life at the rich man's gate for a score of years, and if some accident of fortune placed him in Dives's seat the ear-marks of the beggar could not be hidden by the costliest raiment. . . .

Celia has the instinct of her sex which makes her know without understanding. She is studying me while I'm studying her. Her accent is improving. Her mistakes in the use of words become more and more infrequent. The common tang in her speech has absolutely gone. . . .

Celia surprised me to-day. I've been told I treat the most serious topics with languid flippancy. I find the same inclination growing in her. She surprised me by hurling one of my own epigrams at me. All women are delightful. They are mysteries. They keep yearning and reaching out for the Beyond. Men are not like that. Celia amazes me. . . .

Correcting her manners at table has been highly diverting. They are quite perfect now. She has ease and discretion. . . .

At last I've hit on a name for my book—"A Goddess in Rags." I make the heroine outgrow the title, just as Celia has done. The book is absolutely raw truth. . . .

Three months since the day Celia came here. She has on a very pretty gown to-day. It's only gingham, but I'm sure she's wearing better stays, for her hips are not one-sided as they used to be—from broken whalebones, I imagine; the muslin cunningly responds to the curves of her form. Her low, russet shoes, too, are really smart—broad toe and low heels. I remember once telling her they were the right thing. How adaptive women are! A hint sends them spinning along the right road. A man must either be whipped or led along with a guide-book every step of the way. . . .

She does not speak of Denny Ryan any more. In fact, I can't induce her to discuss him. Well, thank heaven, before this uncommunicativeness set in I caught

him and will have him safe behind the covers of a book by the Fall.

Brockie tore the papers into fragments, and clasping his hands around his knees looked meditatively at Celia. It was all true. The pretty, rough colt had assumed the sleekness and shine of a thoroughbred. Celia was an amazingly perfect counterfeit, a splendid imitation.

She wore gingham, but she required velvet and lace. Her hair, ruffled by the breeze, could not have glistened more had a maid's arms ached from brushing it. The hands that held the heavy volume over which she bent were white and soft, the nails like faint pink jewels.

"What's the book to-day, Celia?" he asked, lounging over to a seat near her.

"'Nelson,'" she murmured, without looking up.

"Still 'Nelson!' I thought you'd finished that weeks ago."

"I'm reading it again."

"You find the progress of a hero fascinating?"

She placed the book face downward on her knee and lifted her reposeful, glowing eyes.

"Not Nelson. Lady Hamilton is far more fascinating to me. He loved her awfully, didn't he?"

"You'd like to be loved that way?"

"Oh, yes. But she didn't deserve that love. I can tell. Oh, a woman can see straight through her. She never loved anyone but Charles Greville. When he sold her to Sir William Hamilton she thought first of herself forever after. Everyone was wild about Nelson, and that's what caught her—his—er—glory. She didn't love him. Here's her picture as a sibyl—isn't that a sort of witch? Wait—I'll look in the dictionary, anyway. I found lots of words yesterday."

"You find books interesting, Celia?" he said, when she had resumed her seat after finding the definition.

"Some books. You know when I was going through the public school I read nothing but story papers. Before I came here I'd been reading

novels a lot. But oh, these books here—that 'Life of Nell Gwynn'—real people, eh?—oh, they're wonderful! I'd studied of King Charles in school, but there wasn't a word about Nell Gwynn in the history. She was the limit—eh?" and she laughed gaily. "King Charles wasn't any better. They had high jinks at that court, on my word. Oh, I'm going to find out lots after this. I belong to a library now, and I'll get books like this in future. I'll be dreadfully wise very soon."

"Celia, tell me about Denny Ryan. When are you going to marry him?"

A flush spread under her white skin, a look of disgust crept into her eyes, then her lids fell and her face grew cold.

"I don't see Mr. Ryan any more."

"A lovers' quarrel?"

"No, Mr. Mott, I don't like him any more, and I can't understand how I ever liked him. I guess—I think it must have been because I was so lonely and had the blues so terribly, and he was the only one who tried to cheer me."

"Poor Denny! Then he's no longer welcome in Rivington street?"

She looked up with a pretty defiance.

"I don't live there any more."

"You've left your home?"

"You see, my brother took Denny Ryan's part, and they both said—well, no matter. I couldn't stand it. You see, I was different from them, and I only wanted a chance to find it out. Well, somehow being here with you and getting to know a few things have made me very sure of it. I cleared out of the place, and I board in Seventeenth street now. I go and see my father on the ferryboat often and give him some money. He is really glad I've left. The poor old man is satisfied as long as I do well, and he has peace in his home now. I love him, and if I ever can I'll make things easy for him."

The next night Brockie dined with his cronies at Ardsley and stayed on to garden theatricals at a house in the neighborhood. He took the last

train to the city. It was almost one o'clock when he paid the cabby at his door. As he crossed the pavement a waltz tune as rapid as a dervish's whirl, and born of the champagne, was spinning in his brain. He thought he saw a shadow waver before him and retreat. As he pulled out his key and went up the one step to the cavernous doorway he became aware that the shadow was beside him. Then it seemed as if the house came down on him. In reality he received a vicious blow from a hard fist. He was dragged by the collar into the light of the lamp.

Denny Ryan's face flamed at him, and Brockie closed his eyes. It was not a pleasant face to look on. He had likened him to one of Boadicea's oarsmen, but he looked now, with his big body, red hair and white, sneering face, like an earlier savage, a primeval man setting out to seize the woman he desired, and ready to slay all who stood in his path. This idea flashed through Brockie's brain even while Ryan shook him and leered at him.

"So it's you as took my girl, is it, and filled her with notions, so no one's good enough to walk on the same side of the street with her? It's you's come between us, is it? Do you mean to marry her, or what's your game? Did you think because you had cash and fine clothes you could come with your lugs and throw ice between us without gettin' biffed for it, did yeh?"

Brockie found it hard to speak. The stillness of the street was oppressive. No one would come to help him. He poured forth denials mixed with a broken explanation, and moaned that what he said was the truth.

Ryan uttered an exclamation of scorn.

"I guess on lookin' at you close I'm a fool to bother my head. I guess Celia is just playin' with you, an' that's the God's truth. You couldn't make a girl go to the devil for you—well, I guess not, an' I don't believe she'd marry you. She's jest

foolin' with you, an' she'll git sense again. But look here—you let her alone after this—keep out of her way—or I'll do for you, sure. This time I'll just show you what you get fer sneakin' round my girl and turnin' her against me."

The force of his fist sent Brockie whirling against the railings. The blow was repeated several times, till Brockie ceased to groan and lay still on the pavement.

When milkmen and home-going cats were beginning to animate the neighborhood he crawled with difficulty to his rooms, and all the next day his man was busy anointing and bandaging his bruises. When Celia arrived the doors were closed against her. For three days following she was greeted by the same message:

"Mr. Mott has met with an accident and can see no one."

As she persisted in her visits Brockie came to a determination.

"I'll see her once more, pay her and dismiss her. She'll keep coming here till this is settled."

A few mornings later, during a sudden Summer rain that beat on the roof with the noise of drums, she appeared. Brockie thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. She might have posed as a latter-day nymph in drenched lawn and dripping sailor hat, her skin wet and faintly rosy, her eyes laughing, the firm flesh of her shoulders and arms gleaming nakedly through the clinging white fabric.

"I've come four blocks in that torrent without an umbrella," she cried, as she entered. "My shoes are like a sponge."

The words faltered toward the close. Her own dilemma was forgotten as she gazed solemnly at Brockie. He was bent forward as if in pain, his eyes were cerise and purple, his left hand bandaged. Crouched into the corner of the big, pew-like seat, and looking abjectly cowed, he told of his experience.

"I was afraid this might happen," said Celia, gravely. "Ryan often

threatened to 'do' you, as he called it. I'm sorry."

She sat down and fanned herself with her sailor hat.

"So I sha'n't need you any more, Celia," said Brockie, hurriedly, caressing his lame hand; "I'll pay you for the rest of the month, and you'll oblige me by—well, by going at once, please."

She looked round the room regretfully.

"It's been nice here," she said, a wistful little smile rippling over her face; "I'll never forget it."

As she put on her hat Brockie was roused from his miserable self-absorption to notice her condition.

"But I say, how wet you are!"

"Absolutely drenched. I'm an awful guy—eh?"

"But you can't go that way. You're really not presentable."

"Let me stay and dry myself. That won't be much," she said, with sudden eagerness.

Brockie looked unhappy. He flickered his eyelashes in uncertainty.

"An hour more can't matter one way or another," with a curl of her lip; "I shall stay."

"All right. Go into my room and get off your wet clothes. Turn on the asbestos logs in there and dry them," he said, wearily; "you'll find something among my stuff to put on in the meantime."

Then Brockie fell into miserable reflection, the fear of Denny Ryan making his mouth taste like brass. Presently a laugh like a child's rang through the studio, and Celia leaped out.

"Look, I found this. I feel as if I were a model again. Isn't it pretty?"

She whirled before him in the white and scarlet livery of a syce, which he had brought from Egypt. Her damp hair, unbound, swept over the brilliant jacket; below the baggy linen trousers her bare feet flashed as she danced on the dark skins on the floor.

"This is so comfortable!" she said, flinging herself down on one of the wide settles. The sun, breaking out,

poured in a golden radiance that made a glory round her.

Brockie could only gaze at her. He felt an adoration, a faint sense of ecstasy steal over him. It was the worship of the artist for beauty. There was nothing physical in it. The same feeling had dominated him when he took his first long look at the Taj in an ethereal moonrise.

"Celia," he said, slowly, "I never told you that I think you very beautiful. You know you are."

She gave a soft, contented laugh.

"Since I've been here," she said, "and talked with you and read a lot I know what it means for a woman to be beautiful. I'm glad I am," she added, with musing determination.

They talked of other things. Brockie's terrors for himself departed. He read aloud to her, and before either realized it Parks announced luncheon.

"You'll lunch with me, Fatima," said Brockie, his hospitable smile and brilliantly tinted eye illuminating his face oddly. "This last day will be a pleasant one."

"I wonder if I'll ever see you again after to-day, Mr. Mott," Celia asked as she took her place at the table.

"I hardly think so," Brockie ventured, hurriedly, the thought of Denny Ryan falling like a shadow on his sense of well-being. "You'll wish my book success to-day, won't you, Celia?"

She smiled at him over a glass of Chablis. He lifted his, but before the rims could touch in the expression of a toast, Brockie's slipped from his fingers and he stared beyond her, open-mouthed.

There was such terror and awe on his face Celia started up in affright.

"M'm—what is it?" she whimpered, and gave a reluctant glance over her shoulder.

She looked confused for a moment, then her bare feet pattered over the floor to Brockie's room, the door closing sharply behind her.

Brockie wavered to his feet with a white face. He knew now that what

had shocked him was not a vision, not a vagary of his sick brain. Visitors stood in the open doorway. Betty Jefferson, very pale, was there, her head held up at the angle of invincible pride he had occasionally seen and feared. A blond man was beside her, his tweeds and eyeglass proclaiming the Briton. In the more shadowy distance he faintly saw a gray-haired woman staring fixedly through a lorgnon. It was an awful moment. His actual eye saw them; his astral vision was occupied by the picture of Celia fluttering shamefacedly away in her bare feet, baggy trousers and tumbled hair. If the studio floor had opened and tenderly received Brockie into some subterranean retreat where thought by some magic process was suspended and permanent forgetfulness assured, the innermost desire of his soul would have been answered.

Parks approached him with stricken face.

"Nothing would do but Miss Jefferson would come in and surprise you, sir," he said, helplessly; "she simply wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. It's Lord Braybrooke and Lady Upperton-Frere with her, sir."

Brockie looked into his frightened eyes and had energy for one sincere "Damn!" between his teeth before he approached his guests. They retreated before him as if indeed created of mist. He heard the elder lady say: "Rully!" and gasp.

Lord Braybrooke said nothing. He was contentedly impassive.

"Betty!" implored Brockie, and seized his sweetheart by the tail of her fawn covert coat as she turned to go.

Her face was small, white and determined. She swept him with a look of cold disgust and a sneering smile over her shoulder.

"We never know, do we?" she asked, in her light, abrupt way.

"Betty—Betty—I can explain," and they were the most vital words Brockie had ever spoken.

"Oh, I dare say. The explanation is all ready, quite cut and dried, no

doubt." She wrenched her arm from his grasp. "Lord Braybrooke, I'm sorry my little escapade has ended in this dénouement. I assure you I never was aware of these Turkish tendencies in Mr. Mott, and I never saw him with a damaged face before. Neither improves him, I'll admit. Let us go."

There are errors that go just beyond the pale of pardon. In the judgment of Betty Jefferson this was one.

Her engagement to Lord Braybrooke was speedily announced.

Two days later Brockie burned the half-dozen letters she had returned unopened and carried his sore heart to Paris and forgetfulness. He stayed there fifteen months. On the night of his return he dined his publisher.

"You shouldn't have done it, Mott," said that person, with weighty wisdom, after a doleful account of the falling off in the sales of "A Goddess in Rags." "I thought so from the first, but was glad to get anything from you, so let it go. No more tenement house life after this, my boy—it's Greek to you. A person to make that side of existence interesting must be a realist. No more working girls—you know nothing about them. Anyone would know the entire story was evolved from your romantic imagination. Take your heroine, for example—she's the most impossible bit of drawing in the whole book. She's utterly untrue to life, too intelligent, too adaptive, too unwittingly wise."

"But even after enlightenment I made her drift back to her native element and die an outcast on the wharves," Brockie mildly expostulated.

"She should never have left the wharves. They don't, in real life, dear boy." There was the concern of a gentle mentor on Ade's full face as he fingered one of Brockie's best cigars. "Look at that man you call Denny Ryan, too. Why, he's pure fiction—there's nothing tangible to him. He doesn't take hold of you. Why do you grin?"

"Go on."

"Well, that's all. The book is a libel on real life. You should have made a study of a shopgirl as a surgeon goes in for vivisection. But you didn't," he sighed, wearily, "dear boy, you didn't, and the book's a hopeless failure."

Brockie gave a ghastly smile and sipped his absinthe thoughtfully.

A few nights later he slipped into an orchestra chair to see a metropolitan comedy much talked of because of the exact flavor with which it set forth the happenings of the smart world. There he saw a new actress whose resemblance to Celia Murphy was startling. The very similarity was an affront to his artistic judgment, for whenever the memory of Celia had touched his mind he had imagined her back in the element from which he had temporarily taken her, hanging out Ryan's shirts, soap-suds on her arms and a wedding ring like a cart wheel on her finger.

This actress was cast for the minor part of a young and blasé widow, and anything more fetching than her handling of a few sparkling and risqué situations could not be imagined. Her beauty had the finish of a finely cut jewel, and in her gowns, simple, *chic*, but of a curious and expert handiwork that made every woman in the audience estimate their cost, she was beyond cavil.

Brockie fumbled for his monocle and his programme. The part of Mrs. Fairweather was played by Cicely Murfree.

He felt humbled, awed and chilled for a moment.

"The apotheosis of Celia," he murmured.

As he watched her an affection for her flowered in his heart. She was his. He had found her. He had made this dazzling conclusion possible. As a model he had made a conscientious study of her. It was only fair that, as an actress, she should furnish amusement for him. This was his right. He recalled her in the syce's livery, and a heady recklessness swept over him.

DEAR CELIA:

You haven't quite forgotten me? I want you to come to supper at my place to-night. We'll have a lark talking over old times. Do, please. If not to-night, when may I see you?

He scribbled this on his card, found an envelope at the box office and sent it in, waiting for an answer in a murky, September drizzle by the stage door. He expected an informal, verbal response which might be:

"Miss Murfree says to step into her dressing-room, please."

Instead of this, a note, written on heavy gray paper, was handed him:

MY DEAR MR. MOTT:

I remember you most distinctly. I regret, however, having to deny myself the pleasure of supping with you now or at any future time. I shall be pleased to send you cards to my marriage in a fortnight to Sir Alfred Goring.

Sincerely,

CICELY MURFREE.

Brockie sat long alone in his studio that night. His lips wore a chagrined and mocking smile.

"Truth," he said, looking through the smoke wreaths as if at a visible presence, "a word with you. Madam, from to-night I forswear you forever. Poets think of you as a straight-limbed goddess with eyes like the dawn, but I know you now as you are, young woman. Your sense of humor is not fine; you are a practical joker with a sly nudge and a broad wink. I imagined you in peplum and sandals, but you are quite capable of a sailor hat on one side and an eelskin skirt. I thought I had found you and given you to the public. The public didn't recognize you; they had another impression of you. Well, as it turns out, you have laughed in your sleeve at us both. Many ills befell me through a slavish devotion to you, but I'll never forgive you for the last one—Celia Murphy, soon to be Lady Goring, has snubbed me. Good-night, madam. Our acquaintance is at an end."

But in the magical hour nearing dawn, when death and birth have their way and strange thoughts creep into the brains of sleepers, he dreamed that Truth called upon him. She was neither the shining-eyed goddess of his earlier fancy nor the coarse joker of his denunciation. She was really a smart young woman in a tweed gown and sensible boots.

"I just dropped in to explain," she said, with directness. "You mustn't blame me for the unpleasant surprises you've experienced. The fact is, the whole trouble came about through that girl. She upset all my calculations. I couldn't control her. She just snapped her

fingers at me and walked off. Women have a way of doing that. You can never be certain what they're going to do or be. I meant Celia to marry Denny Ryan. That's what she would have done, but—catch her! Why, she mocked at me. I could box her ears. This explanation is due you, and I do hope you won't strike me off your list. You might at least be one of the crush now and then at my 'at homes'—and between you and me, my dear Mr. Mott, this is about as nearly as anyone gets to know me. I have a large acquaintance, but no friends. I'll look for your card now and then. Good morning."